

Montana Department of Military Affairs
Disaster & Emergency Services Division
State Emergency Coordination Center

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Situation Report for August 31, 2006 (issued @ 1630 hrs.)

2006 Wild Fire Response

** All new information included in this report is displayed in ***bold, italicized*** type.

I. - Background Information

- Montana's 2006 Wildfire Season continues.
- As a result of hazardous fire conditions this summer, local governments filed the following fire related declarations with MT-DES:

Emergencies

- Rosebud County
- Granite County
- Madison County
- Ravalli County
- Powder River County
- Missoula County
- Blaine County
- Park County
- Pondera County
- Petroleum County
- Sanders County
- Beaverhead County (*cancelled on 8/28/06*)
- ***Sweet Grass County (new 8/30/06)***

Disasters

- ***Stillwater County (renewed 8/30/06)***
- Yellowstone County
- Big Horn County
- Custer County
- Garfield County
- Treasure County
- Musselshell County

- On 7/31/06, Governor Brian Schweitzer authorized the activation of two Montana Army National Guard UH-60 "Blackhawk" helicopters and crews to assist the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). Subsequently, Governor Schweitzer issued Executive Order # 36-06, in which he declared that an emergency exists within the State of Montana. (This declaration enabled the Governor to place National Guard soldiers on State Active Duty.) On 8/21/06, Governor Schweitzer effectively upgraded the emergency declaration by signing Executive Order #37-06 in which he declared that a **disaster** exists within the State of Montana due to the wildfires. That executive order is posted on the following website:

<http://dma.mt.gov/des/Declarations/EO%2037%20Fire%20Disaster%208-21-06.pdf>

- *Since the State Emergency Coordination Center (SECC) issued its last Situation Report (8/25/06) there has been significant changes in fire conditions in Montana. The most important change for the SECC is the fact that we are now receiving requests for assistance from local government. (Previously, the only requests for assistance had been from Montana's Department of Natural Resources and Conservation [DNRC]). On 8/30/06, the Stillwater County Sheriff requested National Guard soldiers to assist with 24 hour / 7 day coverage on multiple road blocks around the evacuated areas.*

II. - Current Conditions

- Accurate and up-to-date summaries of current fire conditions in Montana may be found at the following website: <http://www.inciweb.org/state/0.6.d.27/>
- The Northern Rockies Geographic Area is operating at Preparedness Level 5. The National Preparedness Level is 5 (the highest level of preparedness).
- **Large Incidents Currently Being Reported (by NRCC) in Montana:**

DERBY, Gallatin National Forest. A Type 1 Team (Bennett) has assumed command. This fire is 15 miles south of Big Timber, MT in timber, heavy dead and down fuels, grass and meadows. Interstate-90 was closed from Big Timber to Columbus. Evacuations of many areas are in progress. Structure protection measures are ongoing. Fire was pushed in all directions by plume dominated fire activity and strong SW winds. Major crown runs observed. 40,000+ acres, 2% contained. (Unconfirmed reports from local sources indicate that the Derby Fire may have expanded to more than 117,000 acres during yesterday's wind event. An unknown number of structures reportedly burned. The Stillwater County Sheriff has requested National Guard soldiers to staff road blocks to keep people from re-entering evacuated areas.)

(NEW) PARADISE VALLEY COMPLEX, Gallatin National Forest. A Type 2 Incident Management Team (Kusicko) is assigned. This Complex, comprised of three fires (Passage Falls and previously reported Big Creek and South Pine incidents) is burning 29 miles southwest of Livingston, MT in timber and litter under story. The City of Bozeman's watershed and several outbuildings remain threatened. Extreme fire behavior with major crown runs and long range spotting reported. 16,000 acres, 40% contained. Expected containment 09/10/06.

SUN DOG, Flathead National Forest. A Type 2 Incident Management Team (Heintz) is assigned. This fire is 18 miles north of Whitefish, MT in subalpine fir, lodgepole pine, spruce, and heavy dead and down timber. A historical cabin, a watershed, grizzly bear and bull trout habitat remain threatened. Poor access, inaccessible terrain, heavy fuel loadings and limited safety zones continue to hamper containment efforts. Fire behavior included individual and group tree torching with short uphill runs initiated by rolling material. 770 acres, 35% contained. Expected containment 09/06/06.

MURR CREEK, Northwest Land Office, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. This fire is 19 miles northwest of Hot Springs, MT in timber. Minimal fire behavior observed. 343 acres, 90% contained. Expect containment 8/31/06.

HOLLAND PEAK, Flathead National Forest. This fire is 5 miles East of Condon, MT in timber. The fire is burning in steep, rugged terrain and torching with spotting. Light precipitation limited fire activity to smoldering and creeping. 530 acres - 0% contained.

GASH CREEK, Bitterroot National Forest. This fire is six miles southwest of Victor, MT in timber. A watershed remains threatened. Smoldering, creeping with occasional single tree torching observed. 8,000 acres, 65% contained.

ASHLEY LAKE, Flathead Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs. This fire is 6 miles northeast of St. Ignatius, MT in timber. Grizzly bear habitat and a watershed are threatened. Steep, rugged terrain, cliffs and snags are hampering containment efforts. Individual torching and creeping fire behavior observed. 380 acres, 0% contained. Expected containment 09/11/06.

(NEW) RATTLESNAKE, Miles City Field Office, Bureau of Land Management. This fire is 21 miles northeast of Broadus, MT in grass, sagebrush and cottonwood trees. Observed fire behavior included running in the grass and isolated torching. 1,356 acres, 70% contained.

(NEW) HOLE IN THE WALL, Custer National Forest. This fire is 15 miles southeast of Ashland, MT in grass, juniper, ponderosa pine and dead-down debris from an old burn. Creeping and smoldering observed. 190 acres, 50% contained. Expected containment 08/31/06.

CLARKS CANYON, Central Land Office, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. This fire is 17 miles south of Dillon, MT. Very high winds blew a spark over containment lines. Fire grew an additional 100 acres. 15,400 acres, 95% contained.

(NEW) HANSON MEADOWS, Clearwater National Forest. This lightning-caused Wildland Fire Use (WFU) event started on 8/8 and is being managed for resource benefit objectives. This fire is 36 miles west of Missoula, MT. 105 acres. This will be the last report unless significant activity occurs.

LISCOM CREEK, Eastern Land Office, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. This fire is burning 35 miles southwest of Miles City, MT in timber. Minimal fire activity reported. This fire was 100% contained at 4,417 acres.

- *Northern Rockies 7-Day Significant Fire Potential (Issued August 31, 2006)*

Weather Synopsis:

Fairly strong cold front will push across North Dakota Thursday. It will be windy and much cooler eastern Montana and North Dakota with increased humidity with some thunderstorms across eastern North Dakota before the front pushes through. Although cool, continued a bit unsettled western Montana Thursday with spotty afternoon showers and few thunderstorms. Upper ridge will quickly build across Idaho and west Montana Friday. Ridge continues to build across Idaho and Montana over the weekend with very warm and dry conditions into next week.

Fire Potential Discussion:

Risk of new large fires will be lowered to end the week as cooler conditions and increased humidities are expected. One more day of gusty west winds on Thursday across eastern Montana and North Dakota but not reaching red flag criteria due to cooler and more humid conditions. Expect fire danger to increase across Idaho and western Montana by the weekend as hot and dry conditions return. No weather related ignitions expected until isolated dry lightning by Monday.

III. - Summary of State Resources Committed

- **Current National Guard Operations:**

1. *One (1) UH-60 Blackhawk Helicopter with water bucket and support crew of Nine (9) MT Army National Guard Soldiers is located in Helena at the Army Aviation Support Facility (AASF). Staged for Initial Attack (IA) on reported fires.*

Previous 24 hours- Module six assigned to Helena dropped 15 buckets.

2. *One (1) UH-60 Blackhawk Helicopter with water bucket and support crew of Nine (9) MT Army National Guard Soldiers is located in Missoula at the DNRC Helicopter Base. Staged for Initial Attack (IA) on reported fires.*

Previous 24 hours- Module five assigned to Missoula dropped 0 buckets.

3. *One (1) Liaison Officer (LNO) from MT Army National Guard is located at the Northern Rockies Coordination Center (NRCC) in Missoula. Purpose is to coordinate Guard Aviation resources in support of Initial Attack (IA) fire-fighting missions.*

4. *Six (6) MT Army National Guard Flight Operations Soldiers at the Flight Operations Center located at Helena Airport, Army Aviation Support Facility (AASF). Purpose is to support planning, resourcing, reporting, and administrative requirements for all MT Army National Guard Aviation missions.*

5. *Training of an additional 52 MT National Guard soldiers for future mobilization for fire assignments was completed at Fort Harrison of Aug 30, 2006.*

6. *At the request of the Stillwater County Sheriff, forty-four (44) NG soldiers are being deployed today (Aug 31) to assist with road blocks in the areas that have been evacuated as a result of the Derby Fire.*

- *To support the mobilization and deployment of Montana National Guard personnel and resources and to field any requests for state assistance from local and/or tribal governments the State Emergency Coordination Center (SECC) has been re- activated to Level III status. The SECC will operate on “extended hours” and staff will remain “available for immediate re-call” through the Labor Day weekend.*

- *The SECC and the MT-DES Duty Officer will continue to monitor fire conditions throughout the state. The Duty Officer may be reached at (406) 841-3911.*